

plan that encourages sustained parental and community involvement while focusing on making children proficient in learning.

After 10 years of extraordinary work as superintendent of the Mobile County Public Schools, Dr. Dodge will turn his attention to college students as a professor at the University of South Alabama. He will be an associate professor in the Department of Leadership and Teacher Education, training principals and superintendents in the university's master degree program.

There are few individuals more dedicated or more committed to students than Harold Dodge, and this commitment has not gone unnoticed. In 2006, Dr. Dodge was named Alabama's Superintendent of the Year. Earlier this month, he was named an Outstanding Civilian Service Member, the second highest public service honorary award given to civilians by the United States Army, and the Mobile Area Education Foundation named its Fund-a-S.T.A.R. grant program for classroom teachers after him. The city of Mobile named Thursday, December 6, 2007, both the Mobile Area Education Foundation Day and Harold Dodge Day.

Madam Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in recognizing a dedicated community leader and friend to many throughout Alabama. Dr. Harold Dodge is an outstanding example of the quality of individuals who have devoted their lives to education. I know his colleagues; his wife, Jean; his family; and many friends join me in extending thanks for his many efforts over the years on behalf of the city of Mobile and the State of Alabama. I wish him the best in all his future endeavors.

AMT RELIEF ACT OF 2007

SPEECH OF

HON. TODD TIAHRT

OF KANSAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, December 12, 2007

Mr. TIAHRT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of extending Alternative Minimum Tax relief to millions of American taxpayers. Congress never intended for the AMT to hit so many people. The Senate has already passed a clean bill to provide a one-year AMT patch for the 2007 tax year. I urge my colleagues in the House to do the same and pass AMT relief for the nearly 20 million new taxpayers who will otherwise be subjected to this tax increase if Congress fails to act.

While I rise in strong support of extending AMT relief, I rise in opposition to the AMT bill being considered on the House floor today. H.R. 4351 would not just provide a one-year AMT patch; it would also permanently raise billions of dollars in new taxes on other citizens. Rather than provide a stand-alone patch

or offset the costs by reducing federal spending, the Democrat leadership solution is to pay for the AMT fix by raising taxes on other taxpayers.

Instead of debating a bill that will never be signed into law, we should be working together in a bipartisan way to take actions similar to what the Senate has done. Because of the ineffectiveness of Democrat leadership decisions, millions of American taxpayers will either be forced to pay an average of \$2,000 more or have their tax refunds delayed next year. A delay in tax refunds could have been avoided by earlier congressional action, and we must act swiftly to ensure the tax increase does not become a reality for millions of American families.

The AMT tax was created nearly 40 years ago to ensure a small number of very wealthy taxpayers would pay a fair portion of taxes. Because the AMT was not indexed for inflation, millions of Americans are now being threatened by the higher AMT tax, which effectively takes back tax cuts enacted in 2001, 2003 and 2004 for those taxpayers.

The Federal Government should be finding ways to lower the burden on American taxpayers. Instead, H.R. 4351 would permanently raise taxes. This proposal to address the government's shortsightedness to index the AMT for inflation should be soundly rejected in favor of a permanent AMT fix or a patch that does not raise taxes on others.

I urge my colleagues to join me in voting against H.R. 4351 so we can begin consideration of a real solution that we can send to the President for his signature. Providing a one-year AMT fix is the least we can do as an alternative to a permanent solution. The time for partisan tax-shifting games has concluded. Let's put the American people first and defeat this massive tax increase bill.

CONFERENCE REPORT ON H.R. 1585, NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2008

SPEECH OF

HON. CHRIS VAN HOLLEN

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, December 12, 2007

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this final, bipartisan Defense Authorization agreement for the critical investments it makes in our military readiness, troop protection and wounded warrior care. I am also proud that this conference report cracks down on contractor fraud, provides a 3.5 percent pay increase and improves health care benefits for our military families and restores workplace fairness for the Defense Department's hardworking civilian employees. Finally, consistent with this Congress' commitment to

chart a new direction on the war in Iraq, this legislation requires the DOD to regularly brief Congress on its planning to responsibly redeploy our forces out of that misguided conflict.

To help restore our nation's military readiness, this bill creates a \$1 billion Strategic Readiness Fund to address equipment shortfalls and provides an additional \$980 million to properly equip our National Guard and Reserve.

We authorize \$17.6 billion—an increase of \$865 million—for the Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles that have been so successful protecting our men and women serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. We commit \$4.8 billion for anti-IED efforts. And we allocate a total of \$6 billion to up-armor our Humvees, add armor to other combat vehicles and provide body armor for our troops.

Because we must never force those who have been wounded abroad to battle bureaucratic red tape in order to get the care they need when they come home, this legislation includes the Wounded Warrior Act, designed to correct the disgraceful conditions uncovered at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center and ensure seamless, high-quality care that our returning veterans have earned and deserve.

Improving accountability through more regular and vigorous oversight is a consistent and recurring theme of the new Congress. Consistent with that commitment, this bill requires the DoD and Department of State to issue detailed regulations governing the conduct of private security contractors employed by the federal government. Additionally, to enhance our accountability efforts, we strengthen whistleblower protections for those willing to bring waste, fraud and abuse to the public's attention.

I am particularly pleased that this legislation prohibits fee increases in the TRICARE program, and the 3.5 percent pay increase provided to our military families—while larger than the President's request—is really the least we can do. Moreover, I am gratified that the NDAA conferees saw fit to include important contracting out and workplace protections for DoD's civilian employees in this final report. They go to work every day to serve their country, and it is only appropriate that the nation treat them with the dignity and respect they deserve.

Finally, having worked for several years to reconstitute the core functions of the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, AFIP, in the aftermath of the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure, BRAC, Commission, I am delighted by the establishment of a Joint Pathology Center mandated by this report. Furthermore, I believe the expanded nursing program housed at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, USUHS, will be a valuable resource to military medicine, and I welcome the program to my district.